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### CHINA-IRAN: Beijing Acknowledges Sale of Nuclear Technology

Evidently hoping to deflect Western pressure to control exports of Chinese technology with the potential for the production of nuclear weapons, Beijing has reversed itself and admitted to the sale "for peaceful purposes" of specific nuclear technology to Iran. Thus, a Foreign Ministry spokesman told a press conference on 4 November that while Western press reports "alleging that China has provided Iran with materials . . . for producing nuclear weapons are entirely groundless," China has supplied Iran with "an electromagnetic separator for producing isotopes and a minitype reactor . . . for peaceful purposes" on the basis of cooperation agreements signed in 1989 and 1991 between the two countries (Xinhua). According to the spokesman, the equipment is to be used for "nuclear medical diagnosis and nuclear physics research, isotope production, [and] education and personnel training." The announcement coincided with a statement made by Iranian First Vice President Hasan Habibi who in a press conference the same day termed "a big lie" the "allegations made by Western mass media that Iran was trying to develop nuclear weapons" and insisted that Iran's efforts to develop nuclear energy were for peaceful uses and that the International Atomic Energy Agency was "aware of Tehran's nuclear activities" (Islamic Republic News Agency—IRNA).

The Chinese Foreign Ministry announcement follows a series of recent denials by both Chinese and Iranian officials that Beijing had sold nuclear technology to Tehran. For example, as late as 31 October a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman—omitting any mention of nuclear sales—admitted that China has "cooperated" with Iran and other countries "in the field of the peaceful use of nuclear energy," but denied having sold Iran the means to manufacture weapons (Xinhua). The same day, an Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman asserted that media reports of "Iran's efforts to secure nuclear weapons in cooperation with . . . China" were "false claims" (IRNA). Earlier in the month, a Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman rebutted allegations in the U.S. press that China is helping Iran build a nuclear reactor or selling Tehran nuclear missiles (*Renmin Ribao* overseas edition, 21 October), while the previous day China's Xinhua news agency had reported that the Iranian Embassy in India

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called the press reports "baseless." Neither Chinese nor Iranian media were observed to report specifically on any discussions of Chinese nuclear sales to Iran during President Yang Shangkun's 30 October - 2 November trip there.

#### **CHINA: Controversy Over Writer Wang Meng, Cultural Policy**

Renewed criticism in Chinese media of reform-minded writer and former Culture Minister Wang Meng and Wang's reported efforts to defend himself through an unprecedented libel suit against an official literary journal attest to stepped-up conflict within the party leadership over cultural policy and suggest that as the November plenum approaches party conservatives are again attempting to secure the appointment of a hardliner as the replacement for Wang. The indirect criticism of Wang appeared in the 14 September issue of the Chinese Writers Association journal *Wenyi Bao* in the form of a letter from a reader objecting to a literary award bestowed last year on Wang's February 1989 novelette, "Thin Hard Gruel." Without mentioning Wang by name, the reader accused the author of engaging in "veiled attacks" on the socialist system and on the party leadership "under Deng Xiaoping." The *Wenyi Bao* criticism is not known to have been given wider dissemination. Although there has evidently been no mention in central Chinese media of Wang's libel suit, his efforts have been extensively reported in independent Hong Kong newspapers, including the well-connected journal *Ming Pao* (11 October).

The relatively muted tone and limited dissemination of the criticism of Wang this time, as compared with attacks leveled at him last January, and the reported willingness of Chinese courts to consider Wang's libel case indicate that hardliners continue to meet tough resistance from moderate reformers in their efforts to impose strict ideological orthodoxy on the arts and suggest that Wang likely has high-level political support. A more explicit public criticism of Wang last January—which accused him by name of "negating Marxism" and which was carried in such national-level newspapers as *Guangming Ribao* (25 January)—apparently reflected a bid by party conservatives at that time to prepare the way for confirming "Acting" Culture Minister He Jingzhi as permanent minister at the National People's Congress two months later (*Trends* of 6 March 1991, page 29). He, a veteran bureaucrat and hardline literary figure, has served as acting culture minister since Wang retired in September 1989.

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### **VIETNAM-SOUTHEAST ASIA: Hanoi Seeks Better Ties With Neighbors**

Driven by the need to find new sources of trade, aid, and investment capital to fill the gap left by the loss of Soviet aid and spurred by a desire to end its political isolation, Hanoi recently sent Premier Vo Van Kiet on an "official friendship visit" to Indonesia, Thailand, and Singapore. At each stop during his 24 October - 1 November three-nation tour, Kiet and his large delegation—comprised mostly of representatives of Vietnam's key economic ministries—held talks on expanding bilateral relations and on creating a "new framework of cooperation" (Hanoi radio, 24 October). Kiet's visits to Indonesia and Thailand were also capped by the signing of a number of agreements designed to strengthen bilateral economic ties. Thus, in Jakarta Kiet and his hosts signed agreements on the promotion and protection of investment, on air transport, and on merchant shipping (Vietnam News Agency [VNA], 25 October), while in Thailand he signed an accord on the "promotion and protection of investment" and an "aide-memoire on cooperation in natural gas development and sales" (Hanoi radio, 30 October). While no agreements were signed in Singapore, the two sides did agree to open embassies in each other's country and "to begin negotiations" on a number of economic agreements (Hanoi radio, 1 November). In keeping with the economic nature of his tour, Kiet also met with businessmen in each of the three countries to explain the "many possibilities for trade and investment cooperation" with Vietnam (VNA, 26 October; Hanoi radio, 29 October, 1 November).

At the same time, however, Kiet repeatedly demonstrated the importance Hanoi appears to attach to better ties with its noncommunist Southeast Asian neighbors by adopting conciliatory positions on a number of issues. In Jakarta, for example, Vice Foreign Minister Vu Khoan noted in remarks to a 25 October press conference that Vietnam, as part of an effort to more actively participate in regional cooperative endeavors, had formally announced its intention to accede to the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia—known as the Bali Treaty—and to join ASEAN, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (VNA, 26 October). In 1978—the last time a Vietnamese premier visited Southeast Asia—Hanoi had made it clear that it did not agree with the provisions of the Bali Treaty on turning Southeast Asia into a zone of peace, freedom, and neutrality (VNA, 10, 19, 23 September 1978, 16, 17 October 1978).